

“To luc a” Who, when and where?

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[1]

1. Bodies, times, and spaces not yet established

It is always necessary to look from a specific place, from a body, and from a time shared along with others. Nevertheless, these three points of departure should not be regarded as static landmarks, but as unstable processes in a permanent redefinition.

First, I would like to propose that space constitutes a mode of production in itself. To consider space as a process pushes us further than looking at it as a mere geometrical construction. It is about visualizing a magnitude made of tensions among forces and movements, where intersubjective relations and time orders play a fundamental role. Space constitutes itself as production, as Henri Lefebvre writes. “Production forces can not only be determined by the production of goods or things in space, they are outlined as the production of space” (1984:226).

From the concept of non-place introduced by Michel de Certeau (2000) [2], to the heterotopic spaces pointed by Michel Foucault [3], the discussion on space leads to the visualization of the conditions of power, both within the hegemonic system and in relation to possible antagonistic attitudes.

In order to understand the production of space from these dimensions, we should restate the fact that, more than referring to a city, a town, a settlement, etc., what we should in effect try to determine are the number of miscellaneous collective processes that could be defined as ‘the urban’.

As Manuel Delgado suggests (2007), there is a difference between “the city”, which refers to things, and “the urban”, which refers to practices. The opposite of the city is the countryside; however, the opposite of the urban is not the rural, but a premodern way of organization, based on a certain order of routines and a structured distribution, to which the modern urban model responded by means of randomness, fluctuation and the inclusion of the accident. The urban is also understood by Delgado as the opposition to the communal. It does not conform a self organized collectivity, a *Gemeinschaft* [4], but a negotiation process entitled to facilitate a certain -always unconsolidated- vertebration, where inhabitants are dwellers “of whom one only knows they have departed, but have not yet arrived” (2007:52).

Urban spaces seem to have renounced, according to Delgado, to the idea of dimension as a place. They seem, nonetheless, to stick to the definition of “practiced space” as an executive or affective dimension. The idea of a space

which is not built but which is practiced, is thus configured. It never gets to be outlined or named, and “it is always yet to be established” (1999:45).

Secondly, treating the subject as a subjectivation process in itself, where space and time are to be displayed, implies accepting the overwhelming of the body that seems to expand and shrink as soon as it is addressed as unity, and it never gets to configure a definite outline for itself.

The body-made process is crossed by provisional lines that, more than a threat, can be taken as an opportunity. Although it is true that such aperture and inconclusiveness render us vulnerable, they can offer us, at the same time, other chances to stay alive, to be with others, and to picture ourselves in the future.



Fig. 3 El ser como pregunta

According to Rolnik [5], along with the subject often regarded in the light of its perception, reasoning, and the abilities of the will, or precisely before it, there exists another presence: the presence of a question for which it seems not to exist a precise term, but which refers to the power of the living, to the vulnerability of the senses. Further than just sensations, it implies remembering our framing in collective agency and enunciation devices. It does not refer to the outside, since it is placed within the subjectivation process in the form of a question and not as a solution or counter-proposal; there is no longer such thing as a subject's outside or inside; in its place we are left with a paradoxical bond (?-being).

This paradoxical bond is analyzed by Suely Rolnik from two different processes: a move to shape the contour for that being who, in its very lack of stability, turns out to be permanently 'uncontournable'; and a move towards thaw, towards the defrosting implicit in the designation of an unreachable plenitude. This second drive displays the being in a permanent state of germination.

The subject is thus conformed as an ambivalent battlefield: it produces and it is produced, it mediates between worlds, spaces and things; but it is also a mediated living being, bares an extraordinary representational aptitude, and, nonetheless, can not escape from its eternal condition of being subject to representation.

Finally, like the notions of subject and space, the normalized idea of time must also be problematized. The consideration of time as a productive process leads us to address a number of different conditions for the determination of experience and memory, as it wrecks the universal, neutral, and infinite concept, not affected by the passing of time.

Power over time is, presumably, our highest aspiration. We have the suspicion that this power is currently controlled by the hegemonic system in which we live. To problematize the lack of control over our times brings up the debate on the

reaches of the capitalist linkage between living the body's time and its own emancipatory chances.

Both the relations we maintain with time and the shapes we use to conceive it, respond to distinct sensibilities and lead us to reconsider not just different historiographies [6], but also individual processes which are hard to classify. For these processes we assume a certain distribution of time and, conversely, a determined ordination for memory.

The personal and provisional time conceptions of our bodies, as well as the spaces of our memory, are deeply affected by a multiplicity of dislocations that have taken place within our receptive systems on a number of different levels. The impact of the technological development in the digital era is significant, as is the way in which it enhances ephemeral, fast and often simultaneous experiences that conform our everyday life.

Our relationships with spaces, times and bodies turn out to be as meaningful as those we do not establish –or that we establish without our noticing. However, this does not imply that everything is decided in spite of us. It must not be forgotten how Foucault already mentioned that the very devices of power leave open paths, spaces for collective and individual refreshment and creativity that must be explored: “If I never speak about what should be done, it is not because I fear there is nothing to do; it is rather the opposite: I proceed this way since I believe there a thousands of things that can be invented and produced by those who, through the recognition of the power relations in which they are involved, have decided to resist or escape from them” (Foucault, 1981:92).

It is possible to think that every form of reaction has already been controlled, globalized and expropriated, that there is no such thing as a vanishing line in this present after postmodernity. But subjectivation and deterritorialization processes seem to share a common unstable substance with time, space and bodies, which allows for the emergence of unexpected modalities of agency.

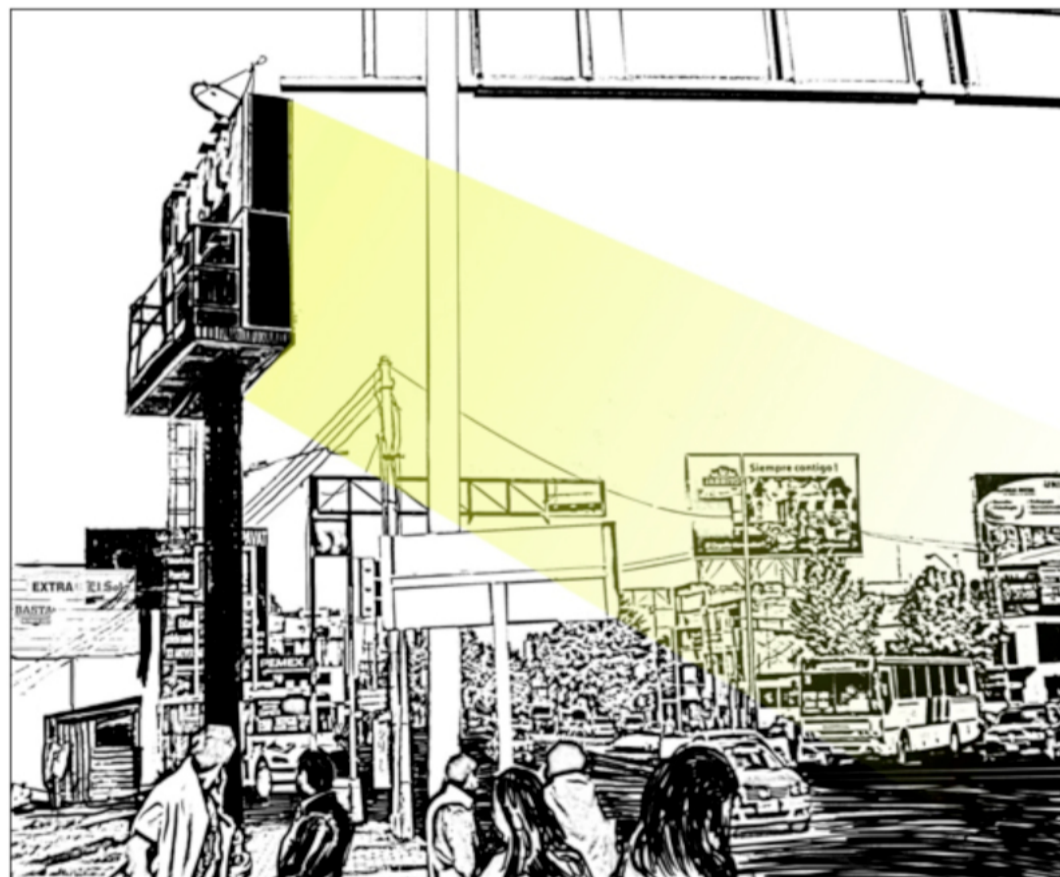


Fig 1. The palimpsest space

2. From the production in space to the production of space at the intersection of Guerrero Street

“Walking turns to spatial organizations, regardless of how panoptic they are: it is perceived neither as strange nor in consent. It creates both a shadow and something unclear in them. It implies the multiplicity of its references and quotes” (De Certau, 2000: 113).

The term “palimpsest” [7] is etymologically related to the Greek word ‘palin’, meaning ‘once again’, and ‘psao’, ‘to scrape’. It refers to papyrus and parchments which, once written, were scratched in order to be recycled as supports for new writing. It not only implies the overlapping of layers, more or less readable depending on their date, but also the action of attempting to erase the former. This action is not always successful, not just because they were not deeply scraped, but also because, due to contemporary technologies and media –such as X rays–, some of these texts can easily be deciphered.

Opposite to the main gate of the university campus of Toluca, there is a crossroads between two big avenues that connect the downtown area with the residential towns and settlements located around this young industrial city. This crossroads is one of the main entrances to the city, through which large amounts of traffic pass everyday. A big LED screen has been installed on the spot (LED is the acronym for Light-Emitting Diode). It is one of the biggest screens in Toluca, both an advertising and informative board for a diversity of companies and institutions.

This electronic screen is not the only advertising element of the intersection. We can count eight other analogical boards (called spectacular in Mexico), a second -and smaller- LED screen, placed in the roof of a private building, and many circulation signs that indicate directions, limit speeds, and other limitations. One can say that a jungle of impossible signs is created in this space; signs that cannot be perceived at the speed of a car, but that are entertaining enough in the traffic jams often formed at the traffic light.

We are not going to get into the analysis of the messages displayed in this electronic screen. It should be enough to know that they are fundamentally institutional, related to corporate events, news or advertisements from a communications group. The screen has a wide colour range and stays sharp even under direct sunlight. Obviously, at night, the definition improves.

The information displayed on the screen is controlled by a computer, be it text, image, or image in motion. What is relevant is the fact that content can be refreshed instantaneously, so the replacement of advertisements or information is no longer an issue, as it was in the case of conventional paper or fabric-based supports. The essence of this way of communication is the permanent change of its display, a change controlled from an unique place, that brings us back to that very moment of scraping and rewriting. The only difference is that, in this case, all bytes gone -or lights turned off- do not leave any trace behind.

Our experience and our memory are placed in an uneven process between concentration and distraction, two different concepts of unstable and capricious boundaries. We are placed within a space of fluxes, where nothing is permanent, where there are almost no reference points to orient ourselves. These giant electronic screens seem to represent a paradigmatic production of symbolic capitalism. Its spectacularity is directly related to that alienation Debord foresaw in

the “Society of Spectacle”, or Hardt and Negri in their idea of the mediatized subject [8].

This phenomenon can be regarded as a step forward to the public sphere of such an effective control medium as television, which has been in people’s living rooms first, in their kitchens and bedrooms later, and currently in the seats of planes, buses and private cars.

Time and memory technologies -in Maurizio Lazzarato’s terms (2006: 151), referring to radio, television and the Internet- are communication and expression devices that reconfigure the uses and functions of time. They are “brain-to-brain remote action devices in control societies [...] mobilizing attention and memory implies mobilizing the living” (2006: 158). These devices act within particular times, on durations we could consider to be natural to memory, and mix both the individual’s and the alien’s, the past and the present; that which takes place and that which is imagined. These are all mixed in a shared recipient we could call time, and in a personal appropriation we could call memory.

We have tried to reflect, until now, on reception from the viewpoint of people who move in vehicles; nonetheless, this LED screen is far from being a virtual image in space, it is an awesome artifact installed in one of the sidewalks of the intersection. Its placement coincides with that of an ice-cream kiosk and some bus stops, which results in an intense pedestrian traffic: people waiting, people buying and selling, people who run into each other under this big screen, often ignoring it and thus creating a very different space from the one that exists a couple of meters above.

This overlapping of strata can not be meshed in an unique solution. The public, pedestrians, drivers, consumers, athletes, citizens, criminals, deliverymen, students, salesmen, families, lovers, housewives, travellers, etc., they all accumulate in layers which are not necessarily opposed or complementary, but which cross and build each other in space, thus showing itself as a singular and complex production form.

It is interesting to remind how Ángel Rama (2009) had already introduced, in respect to the baroque city, the idea that the shape of the city correlates with its very social order. The hierarchical social order of the colonial empire was transposed into a geometric distributive order by the founding of what came to be called the ‘lettered city’. The idea that the city is defined in relation to letters, and particularly in relation to writing, relegates the colonial city of the New World to a diglossia which the author believes still continues in modern times. Written signs confronted other life processes in this same physical space, a relation the author exemplifies by means of the spoken word. In opposition to the stiffness of the king’s word, autonomy, and permanence, he places those liquid words which are not supposed to reach the other side of the Atlantic, but which stay in the corners and squares of this same land.

So far we have the paradox that it is from this enlightened city, this ‘lettered city’ of orthogonal and numbered streets, that order is executed, with the purpose of subordinating all other possible spaces, bodies, and times. From another perspective, it is by our insubordination to this very same order that we can make room for other forms of experience. From those days to ours, the issue appears to be focused in the same lineage of phenomena: ordination, subordination, insubordination [9] .

Conversely, one should consider that, already from the Baroque, there is a will to inculcate ideologies in crowds who appeal to certain mass-media for the transmission of the message. According to Rama, the baroque discourse is not limited to words, but it “integrates them with emblems, hieroglyphs, companies, apologies, and ciphers, and it places

this complex enunciation among a theatrical deployment appealing to painting, sculpture, music, dance, and colours” (2009:65).

It is then when the space seems to present itself through two simultaneous functions, both as the theatre of the strategic operations of power, and the multitude of tactic operations that take place in its core, which constitute processes nondetachable from the very production of this space.

The LED electronic screen, as well as its consumption and the everyday circulation of pedestrians and drivers, build a simultaneous but multiple space. Although they do not appeal to the same intensities and realities, we would rather not consider them as opposed in a dialectic relation.

As Kracauer wrote in 1927: “crossed with thunders, human masses always wallow in the burning zone as if they were new. But it is neither handled by ornaments, nor it lingers in the shiny nonsense of the captive artifice of fireworks. Without any perturbation, it follows its own path. While provided with clocks, canes, and ties, it pushes itself forward, its proprieties spark over itself, in signs and writings that emerge in front of an alien sky to finally vanish in it” (2006:255).

This is not the place to address any simplifying dichotomy of the public and the private, not to confront popular life, the social life that is built in every space regardless its permanence, to the illusion projected from the hidden place that are the messages of an almighty control.

It is neither the spot for denouncing the threat of uprooting, nor for the diagnose of the list of horrors that cognitive economy lets us foresee in her most human way which is publicity, since this would mean a close understanding of the possibilities of the production of space. With regard to pessimism and the apocalyptic announcements of social rupture, despite hearing throughout the whole of the XXth century, especially in its postmodern modality, it is still possible to defend the land by means of its very production.

All conjoint, simultaneous, contemporary, incrustated, and framed realities, build a spatial panorama in conflict that reminds us nothing is yet forever lost. They remind us that no sign is left without a response, without being reassembled or recontextualized by the number of production lines (subjective, temporal, and spatial, which traverse us) that we sometimes chose and we can always interpret.



Fig 2. The Unheard-of

3. The unheard-of from my roof [10]

“Events take place in us, await us and aspire us, they beckon us”

Deleuze (1989: 157)

When I moved to my house in Toluca, nothing seemed to belong to my everyday life and few things were familiar to me. The first afternoon I hear a voice. I do not know where it came from, and from my window I cannot see it, either; the same thing keeps going on everyday, someone seems to be trying to announce the arrival of a nonexistent train.

Each day the same two people come and carry out the same operation. Virtually the same cars move and the same dwellers inhabit the place. This regularity and repetition generates in my very self a certain idea of an outside, which I have patiently awaited ever since its discovery. October is the month when days seem to be shorter each time; in the first days, sunset, the end of my work shift, and the arrival of the bread bakers coincided, setting a distinguished and unstable reference. By the end of the month, night came a while before bread did.

Not knowing the meaning of a voice, in this case the meaning of a whole contextual situation, constitutes an estrangement, an opportunity to suspend the normalized inherited or controlled configuration. It is also an invitation to be affected that leads to the reformulation of even the most naturalized of our daily experiences: likely events that affect us in an unexpected way and allow us both to invent and to learn.

But, what ways of learning can I develop, as a foreign dweller of a space which I have inhabited for a few months so far but which I can not yet say I have gotten to roam?

Normally, in order to provide them with a certain meaning, we project our knowledge and representations on the sensitive perceptions offered by our senses. These operations of perceptual, sensory, and rational order, furnish us with a barely stable substrata, different from the inconsistency and lack of determination inseparable from 'being affected'.

Nonetheless, as Suely Rolnik remarks [11], the “vibratility” imposed by “being affected”, is one the main elements when it comes to mobilizing thinking-creating power. Sensory organs must be considered, according to this theory, under the light of their two capacities: to apprehend the world through its shapes (precepts), and to apprehend it as a field of forces (affects). The reality apprehended by this affected body is not alike the perception of the world through its own shapes, nor is it the application of our knowledge and representations to this perceived world. And the world does not appear here either as split from a positioned subject.

When I first heard the screams from my roof, waiting for the sunset, and now that those new impressions seem impossible to translate through the representations I have in hand, all the references I possess are currently subject to crisis. Consequently, I have been forced to start some updating and creation lines.

We can confront the voice with a number of different receptive channels. The voice is heard in a casual way, since we have ears, which are devices especially designed for it. As soon as the source of sound is recognized and we find ourselves able to interpret its code, we can confirm that we are paying attention. This same thing happens when we

are spoken to in a language we cannot understand. In the case that the voice does not refer to a known meaning, it is perceived as a mere significant, a sonority, a music. The lack of regulated representational parameters pushes us to coin our own ways of embodying sounds, as well as new ways of expression; it thus intervenes and affects the landscape in which we are situated -both the subjective and objective one.

When the phenomenon is repeated, day after day, in a context where few things still remain recognizable, the effect of this recognition acts in me as if it were a schedule, an effective point of reference in my attempt of building a time of my own.

It is for this reason that I would like to propose these repeated -but unique- events as episodes, since they have been able to engender a time of my own in my very self. The episode is a rupture inside ourselves, a way to signal something which may have always been occurring, but which until then lacked any sense, since it did not affect us. From the moment we opened ourselves to affectation, the episode marks the end of this lack of sense, and opens room for a new plane [12].

It is worth keeping in mind that, despite that the episode is intimately bond with language, it is neither contained nor limited by it (Lazzarato, 2006:182). Signs reveal a concept to the one who is aware of the code; the rest of us get nothing but an intonation, a singular configuration which we could consider more of and expressive than of a communicative kind, and which affect us, either mobilizing or neutralizing us.

The contact with the unheard-of, with what has not yet been heard, forces us to rethink experiences which have already been registered, embodied, and filed. It forces us to propose paths of interpretation through which we have already trodden, but which, at the same time, are no longer the same.

ILLUSTRATIONS

1. Drawing of the LED screen placement at Guerrero street intersection, Toluca. Loreto. C
2. Still from the movie *The unheard-of* (4' 30"), produced in October 2011. Screened for the first time at Centro de las Artes de San Luis de Potosí, on October 27, 2011, within the frame of the I *Encuentro Arte y Significación*, organized by CENART. Loreto. C
3. Scheme of Suely Rolnik's lecture *Body, Image, and Knowledge in Global Culture*, within the context of the Research Project "Imágenes del arte y reescritura de las narrativas en la cultura visual global". Faculty of Fine Arts, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 24 June, 2011. Loreto. C

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Footnotes

[1] “To luc a” is a reference both to Toluca, the capital of the state of Mexico, located an hour away from Mexico DC, and to the English translation of “mirar a”, written as it sounds in English. I have used this coincidence in relation to the idea that to look at something always implies an act of positioning which is always hard to specify.

[2] One could say that reflections on the non-place, its features and potentialities, have been the focus of a part of the architectural theory of the late XXth and the early XIXth centuries. The difference between ‘place’ and ‘non-place’ was introduced by Michel de Certau and developed later by authors such as Marc Augé. This article will not address the discussion between places and non-places, since it will be focused on other issues.

[3] “Real and effective places, which are types of counter-emplacements, types of perfectly realized utopias, in which

actual emplacements, all the rest of real emplacements that can be found in the realm of culture are simultaneously represented, questioned and inverted, types of spaces located outside all spaces, even if they are however reachable” (Foucault, 1984:48)

[4] We can structure the different dimensions of space under the difference between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* that Ferdinand Tönnies established in 1887. *Gemeinschaft* constitutes a community bond together by the sharing of a common past experience. *Gesellschaft* is a voluntary and, up to a certain extent, arbitrary association, based on reason, and able to build an imaginary and mechanical structure that we call society (Tönnies, 1947).

[5] These ideas were shared by Suely Rolnik in the seminar held on June 24, 2011, at the Faculty of Fine Arts, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, under the name of *Body, Image and Knowledge in Global Culture*, within the frame of the R+D Project *Art Images and the Rewriting of Narratives in Global Visual Culture* (HAR2009-10768). Rolnik’s idea of the subject is framed in Deleuze’s philosophy. It interprets Foucault’s notion of ‘device’ as tangled lines of the strength of power, of knowledge, of fracture, of fissure, of objectification, that shape an unstable hank in which we can distinguish two tendencies: one that drives us towards the stratification and sedimentation of what we are (even if we are starting to not be), and another tendency that brings us back to the actuality of happening, that which we actively are.

[6] This time, understood as age, is developed in the set of reformulations of the idea of history and around it. Francois Hartog (2007) has recently inserted in conversations about time the term “presentism”, by which the different notions of time as past, present, and future that seem to have worked in modernity are substituted by the idea of singular times crossed by a colonialist and globalizing time. Present is now dominant, and Hartog identifies this change in the decade of the 80s. This eternal time seems to coat everything as if it were a cloak; a global phenomenon which, however, will appear in a different fashion each time. Besides, it will appeal to memory and testimony as basic conformation and resistance elements of the separate and individual times. It will thus highlight that it is an order not so much based in the cultural happenings of history, but in the events of memory (2005).

[7] The metaphor of space as a palimpsest was first enounced by Michel de Certeau (2000: 221): “The space is the palimpsest. Scholar analysis can only acknowledge its last text; for the analysis it is nothing but an effect of its epistemological decisions, of its criteria and its aims. It is still surprising that all operations conceived based on this reconstitution still bare a fictional feature and owe their success not so much to their insights than to their faculty of crashing the constitution of these games among distinct strengths and times”.

[8] The ‘mediatized subject’, former alienated subject, is one of the subjectivities pointed out by Negri and Hardt in their work. It helps the current development of Capitalism, along with the indebted, insured, and represented subject, as they present in their book *Commonwealth* (2011).

[9] After Rama’s argument, within the urban phenomenon, social rather than communitarian and historically defined, this space “is not society’s mirror, but its expression” (Castells, 444: 2008). The new vision of a space which is not reduced to to the tangible, but which also assumes transitions among networks, exchanges, and virtual presences, is today a recurrent issue that has been thoroughly addressed by authors such as Manuel Castells and Saskia Sassen. To this second scholar, it is all about visualizing, from a critical viewpoint, the new boundaries and subjects that, despite still being present, seem to vanish in a context which paradoxically defines itself as global.

[10] This section is a reference to the homonym video *The Unheard-of* (2011). It shows the arrival of the bread delivery truck and the barkers' work, both captured from my roof. The movie registers the daily repetitions of these actions in the month of October, and it frames the set of different shots in a multiple screen, in which the barkers' loud voices act as a chorus with the overlapping of days.

[11] Suely Rolnik's lecture *Body, Image, and Knowledge in Global Culture*. Faculty of Fine Arts, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, June 24, 2011.

[12] According to Deleuze, "Knowledges created inside ourselves, await us, and aspire us, they beckon us." (1989:157). Or an event "marks an interruption, a cut, in such way that time is interrupted so as to be recovered from another plane" (1989:162).